*“Internet privacy involves the right or mandate of personal privacy concerning the storing, repurposing, providing to third-parties, and displaying of information pertaining to oneself via the Internet”. (WIKIPEDIA)*

**THE INTERNET – HOW IT HAS AFFECTED OUR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION**

It has often been said that information is power and those that are not informed are simply deformed. Thus, in a world like ours that is full of ignorance, it is important to know that it is information that enlightens, it is information that makes you aware of your rights and it is nothing but information that enables you prepare for a better future.

These are some of the reasons why people in various nations of the world of have called for the release of information, especially those that have been classified as secret by the government.

Because of the fact that few countries can afford to be very transparent with information because of corruption and fear of revolution, not a few have turned to the Internet in order to get uncensored information.

Governments in countries like Iran, North Korea and China have blocked certain websites in order to prevent the free flow of information and file sharing.

However, in a cyberworld where sites such as the controversial Wikileaks created by the Australian hacker, Julian Assange exists; the grip of government on the free flow of information appears to be weakening.

Without the Internet, it will be almost impossible for something like Wikileaks to have the kind of effect it had and the chaos that it is causing even with the creator in jail. The call for freedom of information still continues relentlessly in various nations of the world.

However, because of the anonymity and the vast reach of the Internet, millions of activists and human rights advocates can share information via file-sharing software and have taken the battle to the cyber-kingdom where there is no king. That is the beauty of the Internet.

Over the Internet, information spreads at the speed of light and protests can easily be mobilized and organized with scathing precision. Although governments are fighting a seemingly invincible Internet, only the future knows the ultimate champion.

In today’s technological world, millions of individuals are subject to privacy threats. Companies are hired not only to watch what you visit online, but to infiltrate the information and send advertising based on your browsing history. People set up accounts for Facebook; enter bank and credit card information to various websites.

Those concerned about Internet privacy often cite a number of *privacy risks* — events that can compromise privacy — which may be encountered through Internet use.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_privacy#cite_note-7) These methods of compromise can range from the gathering of statistics on users, to more malicious acts such as the spreading of spyware and various forms of [bugs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Software_bug) (software errors) exploitation.

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Privacy measures are provided on several social networking sites to try to provide their users with protection for their personal information. On Facebook for example privacy settings are available for all registered users. The settings available on Facebook include the ability to block certain individuals from seeing your profile, the ability to choose your "friends," and the ability to limit who has access to your pictures and videos. Privacy settings are also available on other social networking sites such as E-harmony and MySpace. It is the user's prerogative to apply such settings when providing personal information on the internet.

In late 2007 Facebook launched the Beacon program where user rental records were released on the public for friends to see. Many people were enraged by this breach in privacy.

Since the year 2000, Internet access worldwide has steadily been increasing. 92.8% of children between ages 12 and 18 report having access to Internet at home and 56% of these teenagers access this Internet alone in their room. The increase in Internet access for teenagers in a separate room or bedroom presents a concern of safety as their use of the Internet becomes unrestricted.

The risks that can be encountered through the usage of the Internet include issues of privacy. Children are more likely to disperse personal information to others across the Internet. 70% of children saw no problem in giving someone their home address or email. 12.7% of 10-12 year olds report sending pictures to others across the Internet.

Children and adolescents are very susceptible to misusing the Internet and ultimately risking their privacy. There is a growing concern among parents whose children are now starting to use Facebook and other social media sites on a daily basis. Website information collection practices is another growing concern as young individuals are more vulnerable and unaware of the fact that all of their information and browsing can and may be tracked while visiting a particular site.

Individuals who use the Internet have to realize that they must play a role in protecting their own privacy. They must be informed about all of the risks involved while surfing the Internet and browsing. For example, if on Twitter, threats include shortened links that lead you to potentially harmful places.

When you are in your e-mail inbox threats include email scams and attachments that get you to install malware and give up personal info. If on Torrent sites the threat includes malware hiding in video, music, and software downloads, and even while using your smartphone threats include geolocation, meaning that your phone can detect where you are and post it online for all to see.

Certain measures that consumers are called to act upon include: updating virus protection, mind security settings, download patches, install firewalls, screen e-mail, shut down spyware, control cookies, deploy encryption, fend off browser hijackers, and block all pop-ups.

*In 1998, the Federal Trade Commission took into account the lack of privacy of children on the Internet, which resulted in the creation of the Children Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). COPPA limits the options gather information from children and created warning labels if potential harmful information or content was presented. In 2000, CIPA (Children’s Internet Protection Act) was developed to implement safe Internet policies such rules, and filter software. Aside from the creation of legislation, the awareness campaigns, parental and adult supervision strategies and Internet filters are alternatives in creating a safer Internet environment for children across the world.*